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Biz of Acq -- Serials Departments Aren't What They Used to Be: Providing Public Service to Users from Behind the Scenes

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back to a student who has visual learning problems. The license agreement for the Kurzweil product appears to put the burden for compliance with the law back on the consumer.

This is a quote from its "Notice of Copyright Responsibilities and Exceptions":

Some commentators believe that creating a computer-readable version of a copyrighted work for a visually or reading-impaired individual who owns a print copy, especially where the publisher does not itself make such versions available, is a fair use of that work. These guidelines are provided to help users understand that there are important legal issues involved when scanning print material ... It is the responsibility of the user to be sure that his or her use complies with the law.

ANSWER: Copyright compliance is always the burden of the user and not of the producer of equipment which has non-infringing uses. Kurzweil could not realistically do otherwise than to put the burden on the user, because the company could not possibly know all of the uses to which the system might be put by a consumer.

On the other hand, scanning the text using the Kurzweil software for learning disabled users is definitely fair use, in my opinion. While a digital copy is made in order for the work to be read aloud, a court likely would find that this is fair use. If the copy is retained, it should be retained by the individual student. Moreover, section 121 of the *Copyright Act* permits authorized entities (those with the primary mission of providing services to the blind or other people with disabilities) to reproduce and distribute copies of works in specialized formats exclusively for use by blind or other persons with disabilities.

QUESTION: *A college library has a large number of student theses in its print collection. (1) In order to digitize the collection, must the library obtain permission from the former students? (2) Is there a difference in terms of what the library can do if it makes the electronic files viewable by the college authorized user group only or by the entire world? (3) If the theses are older than 1923 are they considered in the public domain so they could be digitized in any case? (4) Do the same answers apply to bachelor's essays or papers?*

ANSWER: (1) Most colleges have graduate students sign a form when they begin a graduate degree agreeing to make their theses available to the library which

may use the theses for interlibrary loan. The first step is to check whether any such agreement for graduate students is required and then determine when the agreement form began to be used. The student is the author, of course, and owns the copyright in the thesis. If there is no agreement, then digitizing these theses requires their permission if the library plans to post the papers on the Web. For all new theses, the library should get this written agreement in place for all graduate students so that future papers can be digitized with no problem.

(2) Restricting access to digitized theses to the campus community certainly reduces the likelihood that former students will complain, but it does not change the copyright status of the work. The college may be willing to assume the risk that no student will complain. If someone did complain, the library could then disable access to that work. (3) For theses published before 1923, no problem. Go ahead and digitize those. If the thesis was never published, however, then the copyright expired at the end of 2002 or life of the author plus 70 years, whichever is greater. So, the death date of the student author is critical. (4) Whether the work is an undergraduate essay or a graduate thesis is irrelevant for copyright purposes. 🐼

Biz of Acq — Serials Departments Aren't What They Used to Be: Providing Public Service to Users from Behind the Scenes

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When we think about serials departments in libraries, we imagine staff sitting at computers all day long checking in journal issues, binding materials, claiming missing items, and verifying access to electronic serials. It's time to erase this image from your mind. Serials Departments aren't what they used to be just a few years ago. Yes, we still do these things, but other more dynamic responsibilities have been added to our daily life in this Web age. E-resources have added a new dimension to serials work and brought both opportunities and challenges for serials staff. The mission remains the same — providing users with the information they want.

The Serials Unit at **Virginia Commonwealth University** doesn't just sit behind closed doors checking in, binding, claiming, and verifying access. The staff have been tasked with answering users' problem reports regarding access to electronic serials and have acquired knowledge and skills necessary to

be successful in their positions and provide users with the information they desire. The Serials Unit is located within the Acquisitions Department of the VCU Libraries. The Unit consists of 8 staff and 1 librarian who is the Assistant Department Head for Acquisitions. The Libraries at **Virginia Commonwealth University**, which includes the **James Branch Cabell Library** on the Monroe Park Campus and the **Tompkins McCaw Library** for the Health Sciences on the MCV Campus, employs 47 professionals and 82 support staff. The annual budget exceeds \$15 million. The Libraries have over 61,000 serials, including 27,305 e-journals.

A major shift from print to electronic was made by the VCU Libraries in 2005. By this time, the Libraries had already implemented the Open URL link resolver, SFX, which came a year earlier in 2004. The e-journal collection started off at a modest pace and then grew explosively. The Libraries recognized a need

for users to report e-journal access problems and it was determined that the best way to address problems was through an electronic journal problem report (EJPR). This electronic journal problem report was based on the ILL parser within SFX and a PHP application was created to uncover problems by users when they use the "Get it @ VCU" button in SFX. This system allows capture of the problem and the user's comments. An email is sent to staff members responsible for answering the problem reports. The EJPR generates approximately 2-3 reports per day. There are days when no reports are received and days when five or more are received. Staff can spend approximately 5-10 minutes resolving an easy problem report and days resolving a more complex problem report. Problems can range from simply having to update holdings statements to contacting a publisher or vendor to get access restored.

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Serials staff responsibilities were redefined and staff were repurposed. Employee work profiles were updated to reflect these new responsibilities. Some of the staff went from a combination of print and electronic responsibilities to 100 percent electronic. The Serials Unit used existing staff because no new positions were added. Of the 8 staff, 2 staff members handle users' e-journal problem reports, along with the Assistant Acquisitions Department Head and the Electronic Services Librarian from the Reference Department. Staff had to perform new duties, learn new skill sets, dust off their public service skills, and adjust to an electronic environment. These same two staff members had worked the periodicals desk providing public service to users about eleven years ago before the periodicals desk was dissolved. A whole new workflow evolved with e-journals. The e-journal journey started off a tad bit bumpy, but has been getting smoother with training, planning, and just plain trial and error.

The Acquisitions Department performed the following steps to develop an effective workflow for handling electronic journal problem reports:

- Identify and analyze the current workflow
- Redesign the workflow to incorporate electronic journal problem reports (EJPR)
- Define and identify skills required for responding to EJPRs
- Implement the new workflow
- Monitor the workflow paying close attention to processes that cause bottlenecks
- Adjust and streamline the workflow to eliminate ineffective areas

Developing an effective EJPR workflow involved a lot of challenges. There was some training and guidance, but the staff had to learn a lot of e-journal intricacies independently. Basically, they had to jump in and learn how to swim. Staff had to enhance current skills and develop new skills. They had to learn about IPs, URLs, and proxies. They had to learn about licensing issues and become intimate with the link resolver SFX. Customer service skills were dusted off and reapplied. New technology skills were captured and utilized. Staff needed to respond to users in a clear and well-written manner. Staff had to successfully interpret users' problems and troubleshoot access issues. How did staff feel about answering e-journal problem reports? I interviewed one staff member, **Angela Worris**, who has worked for the Acquisitions Department for 15 years. Her working title is an Electronic Serials Specialist whose job duties include the following: Maintains Records for Full-Text Electronic Journals and Electronic Serials in SFX and "LINK-OUT" functions from databases to articles; Manages the Open URL link server monthly reports; Monitors and evaluates VCU and VIVA instances after installation of updates using the SFX backup server; Monitors

URL link server to determine if Portfolio and Target requests have been added to Knowledge Base; Responds to inquiries regarding availability and status of electronic resources; Reviews and investigates reports regarding electronic formats; Maintains department Web pages and database of license agreements. The interview with **Angela** consisted of seven questions. Here are the questions and **Angela's** responses.

What is the greatest reward for you in answering electronic journal problem reports?

Angela stated that it was being able to learn the technical aspects of how things work in the link resolver, SFX, and how to solve user problems. She loves that she can teach users how to search and find what they need. She feels honored to get a "thank you" back from users when she is able to help them. At times, it can be like *deja vu*. A light bulb comes on when you remember a strategy you used before to solve a problem. You use it again, and it works!

How do you feel about answering user questions regarding e-serials using the electronic journal problem report (EJPR)?

Angela likes problem solving. Once she felt comfortable maneuvering around SFX and the VCU Libraries' databases, it was less intimidating and became a learning experience for her. **Angela** said, "I can honestly say that once you have a plan for resolving an issue, you have more confidence in your decision-making skills. I was questioning myself all the time before answering a problem. Is this really the best way to resolve this? Should I bring someone else in on resolving this issue? Does this or that person have a better answer and can they cut my response time in half? Should the vendor or publisher be contacted first?" **Angela** feels that answering the EJPR is different than just sending an email answer to the user. The problem report is more complex. Technical aspects of the resolution had to be learned. For example, you have to be able to follow the user's search through the EJPR and understand it. It is essential to learn about such things as proxy, open URLs, and database searching.

What skills did you already have before you were assigned the responsibility for answering electronic journal problems?

In her previous position as an Administrative & Support Specialist, **Angela** worked at the VCU Libraries' periodicals desk from 1996 until its close in 2000. She was responsible for helping users locate journals, search databases, the OPAC, and Internet resources. **Angela** developed good public service skills and learned about database and Internet searching. This position also required her to investigate subscription problems. From her public service duties and subscription problem investigations, **Angela** learned and developed skills necessary to gather information, anticipate problems, investigate the validity of information, analyze and solve problems. She learned how to effectively communicate with users. All of these skills are necessary

in troubleshooting and resolving electronic journal problem reports.

What skills did you have to learn to effectively answer users' questions about e-serials?

Angela had to learn technical and communication skills, and also develop a knack for knowing who to contact for specific issues. SFX terminology, such as targets, portfolios, services, jkeys, parsers, parse params, and thresholds had to be learned. She had to develop knowledge of proxies, IPs, usernames, and passwords. She developed a skill for determining the appropriate contact person for issues at hand. This included vendors, publishers, and various internal departments and staff. She had to understand the structure of VCU Libraries in order to know who to refer problems to for resolution.

How difficult was it to learn the skills needed to answer EJPRs?

The most difficult aspects were time and patience. Problem resolution takes time and dealing with users takes patience. We want a quick fix to the problem and we have to be attentive to users' needs. **Angela** says one has to follow the steps necessary to get answers and there are many stages and people involved. Payments may need to be made, subscriptions checked, vendors and publishers contacted for verification of information. There is the technical angle one must deal with. Proxies have to be checked. People skills have to be applied. Communication has to be open. Sometimes a dialog with users is needed to help resolve problems. **Angela** replies, "It's all a balance between what you thought you knew and what you will learn or have to learn. Never boring! You need a level of consistency with the steps you take. Analytical skills really get fine-tuned as you focus on these steps." **Angela** went on to say that keeping good notes and documenting information helps. It is a challenge doing these things day-by-day.

What steps did you take on your own to learn how to answer EJPRs?

Angela participated in vendor Webinars and read documentation to learn the intricacies of e-serials and the Libraries' systems — **Ex Libris SFX**, **EBSCOhost**, and **Swetswise**. She perused listservs such as **Serialst** and **Ex Libris' SFX** discussion list seeking information about e-serials to which VCU Libraries subscribe. She was very attentive to listserv discussions regarding publisher adds and transfers, title changes, platform changes, and linking issues. She asked questions of supervisors and sought advice from the Library Information Systems department staff and librarians from other departments. She performed personal research on such subjects as OpenURL linking, html, and library databases.

What was the greatest challenge for you in answering EJPRs?

In the beginning, it was learning to navigate and understand the link resolver, SFX. Getting accustomed to technical and link resolver

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terminology was a challenge. What exactly is an OpenURL? What does PHP stand for? What is a parse param and why should it be changed? AutoActive? AutoUpdate? Crossref supported? "What steps should I take to resolve this problem?" is a question **Angela** consistently asks herself. The user reported his/her problem, but now **Angela** must determine the "real" problem. Is it a publisher problem? A link resolver problem? A vendor problem? A subscription problem? An incorrect threshold? A user issue? She had to analyze the differences between what the user sees, which is accessible via a link in the electronic journal problem report, versus what she was seeing on the staff side. **Angela** had to learn how to communicate effectively with internal (users, librarians, staff) and external (subscription agents, publishers, vendors) customers.

One can definitely say that serials departments aren't what they used to be. Working in a serials department today is both exciting and challenging. As electronic resources continue to grow in libraries, they will change the traditional role and activities of staff who work with electronic resources. Libraries are redefining responsibilities and repurposing staff. Staff are learning and developing new skill sets and enhancing existing skills. They are being challenged in working with the complexities of electronic resources. At the **VCU Libraries**, serials staff in the Acquisitions Department are learning to manage the task of responding to electronic journal problem reports from users. The playing field is different, and staff have to put on their public services and technology hats. After interviewing one staff member in the Serials Department who responds to electronic journal problem reports, we learn that communicating effectively with customers, determining the "real" problem, understanding terminology and technology, troubleshooting access issues, and resolving the problem are the most important aspects of the job. There were no well-established training procedures when staff first began responding to EJPRs. A lot of the knowledge and skills had to be learned through trial and error. Staff had to take a problem report and develop methodological steps to resolve the problem on their own. Staff learned that each problem can have its own idiosyncracies. Building upon existing knowledge and skills has proven to be an effective method in problem resolution. Responding to users' questions has been intensive, but staff are developing new skills and keeping users happy. It has turned out to be a gratifying experience for all the players involved. 🌿

In 1993 I was given a small volume of selected poems composed by **Octavio Paz**, the Mexican writer who won the **Nobel Prize** for Literature in 1990. The sixty-seven selections were in English with the translations provided by a variety of individuals. I confess that I never took a close look at the work because I have learned that poetry is a form of writing that can completely disintegrate upon translation. Recently, I found not only another of **Paz's** works, *The Labyrinth of Solitude* (*El laberinto de la soledad*) when I attended the **SC Book Festival** in May, but also the bilingual edition of his 1990 Nobel Lecture: *In Search of the Present* (*La búsqueda del presente*). Now I was ready to explore the writings and thoughts of this Nobel Laureate.

Octavio Paz was born in 1914 in Mexico City. From an early age he was influenced by the liberalism, intellect, and literary career of his paternal grandfather, and he began to write. Like many creative intellects, he became involved in politics and used his poetic talent to dissect the elements of humanity. As he pursued this dissection he began to change his viewpoints, and this led to a riff with his friends, **Pablo Neruda** and **Gabriel García Márquez**. At this observation, I stopped and googled "never discuss politics or religion." There are 4,630,000 responses. The one that caught my attention is attributed to the character **Linus** of the *Peanuts* comic strip. Every year **Linus** waits for the arrival of the Great Pumpkin and thus is the subject of much abuse by his fellow comic strip companions. He muses: "There are three things I have learned never to discuss with people: religion, politics, and the Great Pumpkin." **Paz**, like **Linus**, must have come to a similar conclusion, so **Paz** turned to poetry as a medium for expressing his ever-evolving thought process on politics. In 1976 he wrote: "Between what I see and what I say / Between what I say and what I keep silent / Between what I keep silent and what I dream / Between what I dream and what I forget: / Poetry."

His writings, travel, and overseas study led him to a career in the diplomatic service in the mid 1940s. He was stationed in France when he began to explore Mexico and her identity in the series of nine essays known as *The Labyrinth of Solitude*. Sidenote: On my journey to read one book by every Literature Nobel Laureate, I have discovered I have a knack for stumbling on just the right book to read for each one. One reviewer describes *The Labyrinth of Solitude* as **Paz's** poetic masterpiece. So I am in for a treat.

The first essay entitled "*The Pachuco and Other Extremes*" delves right into the self-awareness of the individual and thus a nation. **Paz** uses the pachuco, youths of Mexican origin that form gangs in Southern cities of the U.S., to micro-dissect this self-awareness, this solitude. As I read his words, I felt the poetry in his prose even in the translation. I could see the pachuco and his world on the streets of Los Angeles. His description of their language, and behavior, down to the details of their clothes, created vivid imagery and an understanding began to emerge. **Paz** considered himself and fellow writers "the guardians of lan-

guage," and it only took a few pages to see that he took this responsibility seriously. "Even his very name is enigmatic: pachuco, a word of uncertain derivation, saying nothing and saying everything."

In 1990, **Paz** was awarded the **Nobel Prize** for his "impassioned writing with wide horizons, characterized by sensuous intelligence and humanistic integrity." And what an extra special present for me to stumble upon the small published volume of his Nobel Lecture, bilingual no less. He begins his lecture with the analysis of the word gratitude. He uses the words to grab us by the hand and walk with him in a garden of words as he discusses language, literature, ethnic identity, modern identity, poetic identity. It is delightful and refreshing, but **Paz** is challenging us to reenter the world and "search for the present."

Throughout his career, which included being appointed as Mexico's ambassador to India in 1962, **Paz** was a prolific writer expressing his thoughts, criticisms, and perspectives on religion, history, culture, and politics. I confess that I finally took a peek into the selection of poems and I leave you three excerpts from the English translation of San Ildefonso nocturne:

*"The man who walks through this poem,
between San Ildefonso and the Zocalo,
is the man who writes it:*

*this page too
is a ramble through the night.*

*Here the friendly ghosts become flesh,
ideas dissolve.*

*Good, we wanted good:
to set the world right*

*We didn't lack integrity:
we lacked humility.*

What we wanted was no innocently wanted.

*Precepts and concepts,
the arrogance of theologians,
to beat with a cross,
to institute with blood,
to build the house with bricks of crime,
to declare obligatory communion*

*Some
became secretaries to the secretary
to the General Secretary of the Inferno.*

*Rage
became philosophy,
its drivel has covered the planet.*

*Reason came down to earth,
took the forms of a gallows
— and is worshiped by millions.*

*....Between seeing and making,
contemplation or action,
I chose the act of words:*

*to make them, to inhabit them,
to give eyes to the language.....*

*Poetry,
like history, is made:*

*poetry,
like truth is seen." 🌿*

